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GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY

Bulletin No. 1 – Preliminary Estimates of Families, May 1975

MAIN FEATURES

Preliminary estimates from the family part of the General Social Survey covering cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excluding the whole of the Northern Territory, show that :

- In May 1975 there were 1,886,100 families with at least one child aged 17 years or under in Australia.
- Of these families, 1,720,300 (91.2%) were two-parent families and 165,800 (8.8%) were one-parent families.
- Of the one-parent families, 19,300 (11.6%) had male heads and 146,500 (88.4%) had female heads.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Introduction

During March, April and May 1975 the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a large household sample survey designed to obtain data on a number of social topics. Topics covered in the survey were the composition and characteristics of families, with special emphasis on a comparison of one-parent and two-parent families; victims of certain types of crime; firearm ownership; and away-from-home leisure time activities.

2. This bulletin contains preliminary results of the family part of the survey which was conducted for, and designed in consultation with, the Family Research Unit based in the School of Social Work at the University of New South Wales, for purposes of research sponsored by the Department of Social Security. More detailed statistics are expected to become available soon, and the Family Research Unit will be publishing a series of survey reports containing analyses of the results of the family part of the survey. Results from the other topics included in the survey will be published progressively by the ABS the first of which is expected to be released towards the end of 1976.

Survey Methodology

3. The survey was based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings (houses, flats, etc.) and some non-private dwellings (hostels, boarding houses, etc.) and living quarters for live-in staff in hotels and motels,

hospitals and educational institutions. The sample was drawn from cities and towns with populations of 500 or more in each of the six States and the Australian Capital Territory. The whole of the Northern Territory was excluded because of the effects of cyclone Tracy in Darwin in December 1974. The survey is estimated to cover more than 85 per cent of the Australian population.

4. In order to ensure that sufficient one-parent families were surveyed, a sample of about 50,000 households was required. All one-parent families in this sample were interviewed, together with a sub-sample of two-parent families, giving samples of about 1,900 families for each of these groups. The survey was undertaken in two phases. The first phase was a preliminary "search" phase designed to locate the one-parent families, and a second phase was carried out at a later date involving detailed interviews of the one-parent families identified in the first phase. The sub-sample of two-parent families was located and interviewed during this second phase. Information was obtained from the members of selected households by carefully chosen and specially trained interviewers. Usually each member was interviewed personally, but where this was not possible some information about an absent member was obtained from another responsible member of the household.

Scope

5. Within the geographic area covered, the survey included all persons aged 15 years and over except patients in institutions such as hospitals and sanatoria and prisoners in gaols etc., members of the permanent armed forces not living in private dwellings, and non-Australians who were touring or holidaying in Australia. Diplomatic personnel customarily excluded from the census were also excluded from the survey.

Definitions

6. Definitions of the major terms and concepts used in the tables in this bulletin are as follows :

Family

A family consists of one or two parents and at least one child (see below).

Parent

A person who is a natural, adoptive, step or foster parent to a child.

Child

A person aged 17 years or less who is neither married nor a parent.

Two-parent family

Two parents (one male and one female) with one or more children. The parents need not be legally married to each other.

One-parent family

All families other than two-parent families.

Household

A group of people living in the same dwelling and sharing the same cooking and bathroom facilities.

Reliability of the estimates

7. Since the estimates are based on a sample, they may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete enumeration using the same questionnaires and procedures. An indication of the likely differences is given in the technical note, page 6. Some figures in this bulletin have been replaced by the symbol *, which denotes that the figure it replaces is subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes.

Rounding

8. Any discrepancies between totals and sums of components in the tables are due to rounding.

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DONATION

NOTE. Enquiries concerning these statistics may be made in Canberra by telephoning Mr L. Kupkee on 52 6528 or, in each State capital, by telephoning the office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

TABLE 1. — FAMILIES BY FAMILY TYPE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN (a) IN FAMILY : AUSTRALIA (b)
(^{'000})

Number of children (a)	Family type				All families
	Two-parent families	One-parent families			
		Male head	Female head	Total	
1	528.9	9.0	69.7	78.6	607.5
2	607.5	5.9	42.0	48.0	655.5
3	367.1	2.6	21.5	24.2	391.2
4	133.5	*	8.2	9.1	142.7
5	48.7	*	3.6	4.3	53.0
6 or more	34.5	*	*	*	36.1
Total	1,720.3	19.3	146.5	165.8	1,886.1

(a) A person aged 17 years or less who is neither married nor a parent. (b) Includes only cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excludes the whole of the Northern Territory.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 6, paragraph 3.

TABLE 2. — DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY TYPE BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN (a) : AUSTRALIA (b)
(per cent)

Number of children (a)	Family type				All families
	Two-parent families	One-parent families			
		Male head	Female head	Total	
1	87.1	1.5	11.5	12.9	100.0
2	92.7	0.9	6.4	7.3	100.0
3	93.8	0.7	5.5	6.2	100.0
4	93.6	*	5.8	6.4	100.0
5	91.9	*	6.8	8.1	100.0
6 or more	95.5	*	*	*	100.0
Total	91.2	1.0	7.8	8.8	100.0

(a) A person aged 17 years or less who is neither married nor a parent. (b) Includes only cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excludes the whole of the Northern Territory.

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TABLE 3. - FAMILIES BY FAMILY TYPE : STATES (a)
(^{'000})

	Family type				All families
	Two-parent families	One-parent families		Total	
		Male head	Female head		
N.S.W. (b)	643.4	7.1	59.5	66.6	709.9
Vic.	499.8	4.7	39.2	43.9	543.7
Qld	235.7	3.1	19.1	22.2	257.9
S.A.	157.2	2.1	12.8	14.9	172.2
W.A.	138.9	1.7	11.2	12.9	151.7
Tas.	45.4	0.6	4.8	5.3	50.7
Total	1,720.3	19.3	146.5	165.8	1,886.1

(a) Includes only cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excludes the whole of the Northern Territory. (b) Includes the Australian Capital Territory.

TABLE 4. - DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY TYPE WITHIN EACH STATE (a)
(per cent)

	Family type				All families
	Two-parent families	One-parent families		Total	
		Male head	Female head		
N.S.W. (b)	90.6	1.0	8.4	9.4	100.0
Vic.	91.9	0.9	7.2	8.1	100.0
Qld	91.4	1.2	7.4	8.6	100.0
S.A.	91.3	1.2	7.4	8.7	100.0
W.A.	91.5	1.1	7.4	8.5	100.0
Tas.	89.5	1.1	9.4	10.5	100.0
Total	91.2	1.0	7.8	8.8	100.0

(a) Includes only cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excludes the whole of the Northern Territory. (b) Includes the Australian Capital Territory.

TABLE 5. — FAMILIES BY FAMILY TYPE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN (a) AND WHETHER AN AGED PERSON (b) IS A USUAL RESIDENT IN THE HOUSEHOLD : AUSTRALIA (c)

Family type and number of children (a)	Families with		Total families	Percentage of families with aged person (b) present
	Aged person (b) present	No aged person (b) present		
	'000	'000	'000	per cent
Two-parent families —				
with 1 child	18.9	510.0	528.9	3.6
with 2 or more children	28.4	1,163.0	1,191.4	2.4
Total	47.3	1,673.0	1,720.3	2.7
One-parent families —				
with 1 child	6.0	72.6	78.6	7.6
with 2 or more children	4.8	82.3	87.2	5.6
Total	10.8	155.0	165.8	6.5
All families —				
with 1 child	24.9	582.6	607.5	4.1
with 2 or more children	33.2	1,245.4	1,278.6	2.6
Total	58.1	1,828.0	1,886.1	3.1

(a) A person aged 17 years or less who is neither married nor a parent. (b) A person, other than a parent in one or two-parent families, aged 65 years or more. (c) Includes only cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excludes the whole of the Northern Territory.

TECHNICAL NOTE

Reliability of the estimates

Since the estimates in this statement are based on a sample, they may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete census using the same questionnaires and procedures. One measure of the likely difference is given by the standard error, which indicates the extent to which an estimate might have varied by chance because only a sample, and not the whole population, was enumerated. There are about two chances in three that a sample estimate will differ by less than one standard error from the figure that would have been obtained from a comparable complete enumeration, and about nineteen chances in twenty that the difference will be less than two standard errors.

2. Space does not allow for the separate indication of the standard errors of all estimates in this statement. Tables of standard errors for general application to these estimates are given below. Although these figures will not give a precise measure of the standard error of a particular estimate they will indicate the order of magnitude. An example of the use of the table is : the estimate of one-parent families in Tasmania obtained from the sample is 5,300 and because the standard error is 240, there are about two chances in three that the true figure is within the range 5,060 to 5,540 and about nineteen chances in twenty that this figure is between 4,820 and 5,780.

3. Standard errors as a percentage of the estimates are shown for Australia in the tables below. The percentages show that, within each family type, the smaller the estimate the higher is the relative standard error. Relatively small estimates are thus subject to such high standard errors (relative to the size of the estimate) as to detract seriously from their value for most reasonable uses. In the tables in this statement, estimates not considered sufficiently reliable have not been shown. Although figures for these small components can in some cases be derived by subtraction they should not be regarded as reliable. The reliability of an estimated percentage depends on the reliability of both the numerator and denominator of the percentage. In general, however, any percentage shown in this publication will be subject to a percent standard error lower than that for the corresponding estimate (numerator).

4. The imprecision due to sampling variability, which is measured by the standard error, should not be confused with inaccuracies that may occur because of imperfections in reporting by interviewers, and respondents, and in office coding and processing. Inaccuracies of this kind are referred to as the non-sampling error, and they may occur in any enumeration, whether it be a full count or only a sample. Every effort is made to reduce the non-sampling error to a minimum by careful design of questionnaires, intensive training and supervision of interviewers and efficient operating procedures.

STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATES

Size of estimate	N.S.W.	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Australia	
							Number	Percent of estimate
TWO-PARENT FAMILIES (AND TOTAL FAMILIES)								
20,000	3,400	3,400	2,300	2,000	1,900	800	3,100	16.0
50,000	4,900	4,900	3,100	3,000	2,600	1,100	4,600	9.2
100,000	6,600	6,600	4,000	4,000	3,300	n.a.	6,100	6.1
500,000	11,000	11,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10,600	2.1
ONE-PARENT FAMILIES								
2,000	470	470	390	330	290	190	420	21.0
5,000	700	700	520	440	400	240	640	12.8
10,000	940	940	670	580	530	n.a.	850	8.5
50,000	1,800	1,800	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,660	3.32

n.a. — not applicable.

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